

WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

# WITHOUT HOUSING

DECADES OF FEDERAL HOUSING CUTBACKS

MASSIVE HOMELESSNESS

AND POLICY FAILURES

## A Study Group Workbook

Created by Sisters Of The Road and

Updated by Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency and  
Western Regional Advocacy Project



*"For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."*

—Paolo Friere

Dear reader,

Welcome! This workbook was created to deepen your understanding of the Without Housing Report. We hope it helps you think critically about housing policy and gives you the confidence and knowledge to speak out for economic human rights.

The workbook can be broken up by chapter and discussed over several sessions or it can be adapted to meet your specific needs. The most important thing is that you engage the material with your community to stimulate debate, illuminate ideas, assess the strengths and weaknesses of the report, and generate organizing strategies.

We've included a section on national poverty and homelessness statistics. We encourage you to compile your own statistics by researching and talking to people and organizations working on poverty issues in your community. This will help you develop relationships and understand the conditions where you live. It will also strengthen your organizing efforts by making connections between housing, health care, education, dignified work, and economic security.

Additional public education and organizing materials are available on our website. PDFs of the report, individual chapters, and charts (in English and Spanish) can be found at:

<http://www.wraphome.org/pages/organizing/publications>

Please share with us any creative exercises you come up in your study group, improvements you make to the workbook, or questions you have. You can call our office at 415-621-2533 or email us at [wrap@wraphome.org](mailto:wrap@wraphome.org).

We ask that you take the insight you gain from the report and workbook to develop effective and socially just solutions to homelessness and poverty in your community and in doing so reinvent the world.

In Solidarity,  
Western Regional Advocacy Project  
May 2012



# POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES\*

## Poverty Rate by Race in 2010<sup>1</sup>

- 12.1% of Asians
- 16% of Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders
- 28% of American Indians and Alaska Natives
- 27.4% of African-Americans
- 26.6% of Hispanics (of any nationality)
- 9.9% of Whites (non-Hispanic)

## Official Poverty Rate in 2010<sup>2</sup>

- 46.2 million (15.1% of the total population)

## Poverty Rate for Children Under the Age of 18 in 2010<sup>3</sup>

- 773,024,577 (22% of the total population)

## Number of People Without Health Insurance Coverage in 2010<sup>4</sup>

- 49.9 million (16.3% of the total population)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=71>;  
<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=52>; and  
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acsbr10-05.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>



# HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

(Opening Doors: 2010 Federal Strategic Plan To Prevent and End Homelessness<sup>5</sup>)

- On a single night, 643,067 people were counted as homeless, 238,110 were persons in families.
- 63% were sheltered, 37% were unsheltered.
- 1,558,917 people used shelters or transitional housing programs, 983,835 were individual adults.
- 43% of sheltered adults without families had a disabling condition and 13% were Veterans.
- Rural areas have a rate of unsheltered persons in families almost double that of urban area
- Most people in rural areas who would otherwise be homeless live in cars, doubled up, or in grossly substandard housing.
- African Americans accounted for 39% of sheltered homeless population, but only 12.4% of the total population.
- Public schools reported over 956,000 homeless students, a 20% increase from 2007-08.
- 50% of homeless people lived in California, Florida, Nevada, Texas, Georgia, and Washington.
- One out of every six homeless people lived in Los Angeles/Orange County area, New York City, Las Vegas, or New Orleans.
- 80% of mothers with children experiencing homelessness had experienced domestic violence.
- 110,917 adults were experiencing chronic homelessness, of which 60% were unsheltered.
- VA estimates that 107,000 veterans are homeless on any given night.
- About 50% of homeless veterans have serious mental illness and 70% have substance abuse problems.
- 40% of homeless people live in street, car, or place not intended for habitation.
- About 10% of released prisoners become homeless.
- 1 out of 6 young adults leaving foster care become homeless.

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<sup>5</sup> Opening Doors: 2010 Federal Strategic Plan To Prevent and End Homelessness  
[http://www.ich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors\\_2010\\_FSPPreventEndHomeless.pdf](http://www.ich.gov/PDF/OpeningDoors_2010_FSPPreventEndHomeless.pdf)



# TIMELINE

(Pages 2-6)

## Timeline Questions:

- 1) Why were the New Deal programs originally created? What situation did they attempt to address?
- 2) What were the major affordable housing programs created by the federal government?
- 3) At what point did the federal government begin to take apart New Deal and Great Society programs?
- 4) What role has the private market played in U.S. housing policy?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Timeline:

- 1) How have privatization, deregulation, and “welfare reform” impacted safety net programs?
- 2) How have the role of government and the right to housing changed since the 1930s? How have these trends impacted you and the people in your community?



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

(Pages 7-13)

## Executive Summary and Introduction Questions:

- 1) What are some of the root causes of homelessness and poverty in America?
- 2) Why has homeless policy failed to end homelessness?
- 3) What are some of the reasons why the lack of affordable housing is a national problem?
- 4) Why is it important to look at our nation's housing priorities now more than ever?
- 5) How does a social justice approach to ending homelessness and poverty change the way we work for human rights like housing?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Executive Summary and Introduction:

- 1) Over the last three decades, funding for affordable housing has dramatically decreased and continues to do so. Explain, in your own words, why this severe lack of funding has caused an increase in homelessness nationwide even though there have been many programs designed to decrease homelessness and poverty in America.
- 2) What is the relationship between homelessness, housing, and the current economic meltdown?



# Chapter 1: AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY HOMELESSNESS AND FEDERAL POLICY FAILURES

(Pages 14-18)

## Chapter 1 Questions:

- 1) What is the connection between the Great Depression, New Deal Policies and the Reagan administration?
- 2) How did officials view the reemergence of mass homelessness in the 1980s?
- 3) What other economic factors created the conditions for mass homelessness to arise?
- 4) Why don't policies and programs like temporary shelters, emergency food and housing, and ten-year plans really work when it comes to addressing homelessness?
- 5) What is Housing First? What factors make it less effective?
- 6) What are some of the negative stereotypes projected on people who experience homelessness?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Chapter 1:

- 1) Inadequate health care, education, employment and housing systems all contribute to homelessness. Why are negative stereotypes of individuals who experience homelessness so persistent in the United States despite these widely acknowledged inadequacies? How does negative stereotyping hurt people who experience homelessness? Give an example.
- 2) How do these stereotypes relate to "free market" principles and neoliberal social policy?



# Chapter 2: THE EPICENTER OF HOMELESSNESS: CUTBACKS IN FEDERAL FUNDING OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

(Pages 19-27)

## Chapter 2 Questions:

- 1) What happens to people when there is little or no affordable housing?
- 2) How have issues such as gentrification and urban renewal affected poverty and homelessness in the United States?
- 3) What was the HOPE VI program? What were the flaws of the HOPE VI program?
- 4) What are some of the problems with market-driven approaches to affordable housing like the Transforming Rental Assistance Initiative and Low Income Housing Tax Credits?
- 5) How does HUD's definition of homelessness impact eligibility for assistance for families and children?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Chapter 2:

- 1) Why do you think the federal government tries to make the problem of homelessness "disappear" instead of making an honest effort to end it?
- 2) What can you do to help change the terms of the debate and raise this issue to a national priority?





# Chapter 3: BAND-AIDS AND ILLUSIONS: THE CONSISTENT FAILURE OF NEARLY 30 YEARS OF HOMELESS POLICY

(Pages 28-36)

## Chapter 3 Questions:

- 1) What was the Stewart B. McKinney Act of 1987? What was the significance of this act in addressing homelessness and poverty?
- 2) What happened to federal affordable housing programs as the government began funding McKinney homeless assistance programs?
- 3) Look at Chart 3 on page 30 of the report. Please explain, in your own words, what this chart depicts.
- 4) What changes did the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act make to the earlier McKinney Act?
- 5) How has the foreclosure crisis affected homelessness?
- 6) Why did criminalization become an approach to addressing homelessness? What activities have been criminalized?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Chapter 3:

- 1) What are the political and economic forces driving the criminalization of homelessness? How have “quality of life” enforcement programs and Business Improvement Districts changed public spaces? What are the human and civil rights consequences of these programs?
- 2) In your own words, describe what you believe the “collective misrecognition” about homelessness in the United States is about.



# Chapter 4: LETHAL TRADE-OFFS: FUNDING DESTROYERS, TAX SUBSIDIES, AND CORPORATE GREED INSTEAD OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION

(Pages 37-40)

## Chapter 4 Questions:

- 1) What is a “lethal trade-off”?
- 2) Why are there more poor and homeless people than ever when the federal government’s budget outlays have doubled in the last 30 years? Where has the money gone?
- 3) Look at Chart 5 on page 38 of the report. Choose one of the lethal trade-offs and explain how it affects the lack of affordable housing, poverty, and homelessness in the United States.
- 4) How does the government subsidization of homeownership add to the lack of affordable housing in the United States?

## Critical Thinking Questions for Chapter 4:

- 1) Explain what the phrase “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” means in your own words.
- 2) How do government priorities and policies increase inequality?



# Conclusion

## WORKING TOGETHER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

(Pages 41-44)

### Conclusion Questions:

- 1) Why does the “Vicious Cycle of Homeless Policy” end up increasing homelessness rather than solving it?
- 2) What were some of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing’s recommendations for U.S. housing policy?
- 3) What will it take to build a movement to end homelessness?
- 4) What are some ideas the report gives you for taking action?

### Critical Thinking Question for Conclusion:

- 1) What are some things *you* can do to work to end homelessness? Write down at least one thing you will do in the next month to help end homelessness, and share it with at least one other person.

